

HAMNET BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY 7 November 2004

HAMNET is the Official Emergency Communications network of the South African Radio League and provides emergency communication to local, regional and national authorities, when requested to do so.

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IN THE BULLETIN TODAY:-

BULLETINS AROUND THE COUNTRY GAUTENG HAMNET MEETING REPORT BACK DECEMBER ARIVE ALIVE CAMPAIGN

1. HAMNET BULLETINS AROUND THE COUNTRY

KZN Sunday morning at 07H00 on their local VHF repeaters with a relay on 7.070MHz. KZN also have a Wednesday evening call-up and meeting on their 2M repeater system.

The National Bulletin at 17H00 CAT on 7,070MHz in the 40M band with a relay on 145,700MHz in the greater Johannesburg area.

The Gauteng North bulletin will follow immediately after the National Bulletin on 145,725MHz in the Pretoria area on Sundays.

North West Province have a club bulletin on Mondays, which includes a Hamnet segment at 19H00 local on 3,750Mhz in the 80M band as well as their local repeater on 145.737.5Mhz.

Hamnet Western Cape Province meets on Wednesdays at 20H30 local on 145:700MHz, relayed on 3,674MHz.

The HAMNET Bulletin is sent to all those of whom I have an e-mail address and also sent out on packet by Rudi, ZS6DX.

Please note, this bulletin is available for download from the web site of the SARL under Hamnet news.

2. GAUTENG HAMNET MEETING REPORT BACK

This meeting turned out to be important, informative, and to a certain extent, a bit of a wake-up call. The contribution by Arthur Bradshaw of Search & Rescue South Africa and Charles Norval of Air Traffic & Navigational Systems, underlined the important role that Hamnet has to play in a search & rescue scenario.

Hamnet will have to re-think its whole modus operandi in order to really be effective when requested by SASAR to assist in an emergency. I personally believe that we should remove this notion that all we do is sit around and wait for a bit of bumper bashing to occur so that we could render some assistance.

Those days I believe have come to an end.

There are more than enough cell phones around these days to handle problems of that nature. Yes, we should still monitor our emergency frequencies, and yes, we should still respond to a call where and when applicable, especially during any holiday Arrive Alive Campaign.

However, what we must concentrate on now is restructuring our whole organisation to respond to serious incidents. Surely, that's what Hamnet was designed for in the first place.

Fortunately, serious disasters in South Africa are few and far between. What a blessing. Yes, exercises are done by SASAR on a regular basis, yes; we do get invited to participate in these exercises and the next one could be more complex than what we have done before.

Are we prepared to such an event? Let's take a look at where we stand now.

From the grant allocation, my first step will be to develop and structure a complete emergency communications kit/unit which can be loaded into a vehicle, a Helicopter or any plane and airlifted anywhere in the country as a fully operational field station. I am considering donating one of my field batteries and my half kilowatt petrol generator to charge the battery, should a station land up where there is no power available at all.

This has now become an essential item that we need to develop, and the equipment has been purchased. What will also be incorporated into this kit will be a voice recorder to record all transmissions for reference at a later date, should this be necessary. Reading a report back on a cycle race which took place in Durban last week-end, recording of incidents like serious injury or even death, must be fully recorded for reference purposes. As you can see, we are trying to develop a state of the art emergency Kit.

Coming back to this KZN incident, I wish to report that Hamnet were complemented by the authorities on not only keeping accurate record of this incident but also being in a position to give full feedback when asked to do so.

Secondly, my committee will have to be expanded to include people who are more in tune with all the developments in communication which can be used in emergencies like Packet, Amtor, APRS, to mention a few. These items are now essential in the search & rescue environment. Yours truly cannot be expected to know everything and be a master of all. It's simply too vast and complex and the load needs to be spread more equally.

I have been criticised for not reaching out to the amateurs in general which is the base from which I can build more Hamnet numbers. I beg to differ.

My feeling is that Hamnet bulletins go out on a very regular basis. These bulletins are available on the web of the SARL. Articles in Radio ZS appear on a fairly regular basis. Here we have a problem as Radio ZS goes out to members of the SARL only. Non members miss out entirely on all Hamnet articles and I do not know if Hamnet items on the web are also for members only.

Being a member of the SARL, I do not know what web restrictions there are. From a Hamnet point of view, this could be regarded as a drawback although membership of Hamnet has always been associated with compulsory membership of the SARL and these days there really is no reason why one cannot be an SARL member. The current Council are doing all if not more than what is required of them to meet the needs of all amateurs around the country.

Anything to do with Hamnet, should be available to any amateur radio operator anywhere in South Africa, alternatively, join the SARL and learn what Hamnet is all about and get involved, especially if Hamnet data is restricted to League members only.

Hamnet has an informal network every Sunday on HF and a weather watch every day on HF. I know we have many listeners out there and if the motivation to join Hamnet exists, amateurs will come forward. Applications forms are available on the website.

To come back to Saturday's meeting. Arthur Bradshaw outlined the complex environment under which they have to work, the vast area they cover and the various International Acts under which they fall, are governed by and have to adhere to. Arthur felt that the SASAR & AT&NS command structures should eventually be incorporated into the Hamnet Manual so everyone understands where we fit into the overall structure.

This will be done in due course. From that statement, you will now begin to realise and understand how important an issue the Hamnet Organisation is to SASAR and AT&NS. This applies not only to Hamnet, but also the 4X4 Rescue Unit and the Mountain Club of South Africa the other grant recipients.

What will also be incorporated into the Manual will be all the various acronyms (abbreviations) in use by AT&NS and SASAR. So what's AT&NS? Exactly! That's why we need to incorporate them. AT&NS is Air Traffic & Navigation Systems which control all airspace over this vast area from mid Atlantic, down to the South Pole and to mid Indian Ocean and as far north as the border with Angola and Namibia.

Shift service! The next exercise could involve us having to put up a station which will undergo a change of command. Have we done this before? Do we know how to hand over command to a new crew? What procedures do we need to follow to ensure continuity? Something else for the Hamnet Manual.

The need for the emergency mobile kit then came up. Are we prepared to be airlifted to a remote spot to run a field station for an indefinite period of time? Do we have the equipment? Do we have the manpower and commitment from our members?

As you can see, this is no longer just a card carrying organisation. Emergencies are for real and it's going to happen sooner than later!

The ultimate question how available are you (or at least some of us) to answer

to the call? Amateur Radio is a national resource. That's why it's controlled the way it is. That's why organisations like SASAR and AT&NS are counting on us. That's why being a member of Hamnet also means being a member of the SARL. This is the Amateur Radio controlling body in South Africa that falls under ICASA and in the end under IARU.

Andy, ZS6CEY then presented a very informative presentation on A.P.R.S. So what is A.P.R.S? Simply, Automatic Packet/Position Reporting System. Developed quite a few years ago, but becoming a critical part of search & rescue. This system is already in use by AT&NS as well as SASAR. They were delighted to see that we are on a par with their developments.

Charles emphasised the importance of availability from Hamnet members. Do we have a key group of people around the country who can respond at short notice? Another situation we need to identify. Provincial Directors, do you all have an action plan in place should you be called upon to respond at a moment's notice?

We are no longer playing games. The emphasis now is how quickly can Hamnet be activated and be available to assist in a national emergency when called upon to do so? How rapid can our response be? Consider the current constantly changing environment we live in today – both politically and the terrorist problem.

Are you as Provincial Director in touch with your members, are you recruiting new members, do you meet regularly either on air or at physical meetings. Who are your key members in an emergency, who is your 2IC etc.

These are difficult questions but they need to be asked.

It is evident that we, more than ever, need to prepare ourselves for that emergency call from SASAR and be ready to respond. Arthur went so far as to indicate that if necessary, more funding will be made available in future for Hamnet to assist in South African Search & Rescue. That is how dependant they have become on our knowledge and communication skills in a real emergency.

Hamnet is now an essential part of South African Search & Rescue, and, after another meeting with Graham Hartlett, it will appear that there are other Governmental and NGO's interested in what Hamnet is doing. Much more later!

Hamnet has to regroup. We all have some hard thinking to do, especially when it comes to one word – commitment. How prepared and committed are you?

Having said all that, I wish to make the following announcement.

As mentioned earlier, I am inviting new members to join the main Hamnet committee here in Gauteng. This is being done for a very good reason, namely to elect my successor from this committee.

At the AGM on 9 April 2005, I wish to step down as National Director of Hamnet. After 23 years of leadership in various capacities of Hamnet, I feel it is time to hand over the reins to a younger and more vigorous person who would like to take over the responsibility of running a very important part of Amateur Radio Emergency Communication.

The time has come to step down and invite nominations of people who would like to take over the running of Hamnet from 10 April 2005. I will endeavour to train and assist the new incumbent to the best of my ability, but I feel that the time has come to move on.

I discussed this fully with Graham Hartlett the President of the SARL, and we agreed that this would be the better route to follow and to hand over leadership to a new person over a period of time thereby avoiding a vacuum by just resigning or stepping down without warning.

I have enjoyed the spell as National Director but invite nominations for new members to join the committee of Hamnet from which the position of National Director will be elected to run Hamnet from 10 April, 2005.

Before we go off the subject of “being prepared” to use a well established phrase, Hamnet has been challenged by Graham to run a mock call-out one afternoon, over a weekend when most of us are not at work.

This is a subtle warning to all Provincial Directors, active Hamnet members and groups to get organised. This call-out could happen before the end of this year or even before the end of this month.

The scenario will be a call for as many operators to come on frequency as possible within a given period of time. The frequencies will be 7,070MHz in the 40M band and 14,170MHz in the 20M band. QRM taken into account.

Graham and I would like to see how many operators we can get operational on 40M and 20M a.s.a.p. after the call, and then the local areas can come back to us with the number of operators they have on stand by on 2M or 70CM.

Gentleman, please take this challenge seriously and let's surprise ourselves. No field stations need be put up or anything like that, just a response time is being put to the test.

I am not joking, this is for real. Be prepared.

3. DECEMBER ARIVE ALIVE CAMPAIGN

I will refrain from calling this the “silly season”. I feel it is an inappropriate name for the December holiday and festive season but unfortunately the silly part tends to focus on those, oh so many people who become statistics during this period.

Yes, its holiday time again and as I write this bulletin, the matrices are already logging it away in the examination rooms across the country.

All schools across the country close on 3 December 2004. I doubt if there will be much traffic on the roads over that weekend but the next weekend is a long weekend in that the 17th being the Friday after the 16th public holiday, one can assume that the 15th will probably see the start of larger traffic flows across the country.

The following week is crunch time, although I expect that most of the traffic will leave for holiday destinations on Thursday the 16th of December. However, from Thursday the 23rd traffic is going to be heavy.

Sunday the 2nd of January 2005, will see some people returning home after just one weeks break and the whole week from 3rd to 9th of January will see the balance of people coming home. At the time of doing this bulletin, the opening of term one of the new year is not at hand but will be published later.

Some alarming statistics have come to hand from the Arrive Alive campaign office. Moira Winslow reports that 1.3 million vehicles in South Africa are older than 20 years. That comprises 17.95% of all vehicles on the roads at present.

From those statistics, 25% are buses and motorcycles, 28% are heavy trailers and 47% are caravans.

In Europe, the average lifespan of any vehicle is 6.7 years. In South Africa people should be encouraged to spend time and money on maintaining older vehicles in order to have a positive impact on road safety.

Even more alarming statistics come from Superintendent Wayne Minnaar, head of Metro Police who stated that at least 50% of all motor vehicle accidents (MVA s) are caused by alcohol levels being over the legal limit.

The legal limit is 0, 05 gr per 100ml of blood or 0, 02 gr per 100ml of blood for professional drivers. What one should also consider is that after every drink, you should wait at least an hour before you drive. The fine for drunken driving these days amounts to a maximum of R120,000.

Even that figure seems to be no deterrent for some people getting behind the wheel of a car. Taking just 2 and one half seconds to fasten a seat belt, could also save a further 80% of lives.

Is that why they call it the “silly season”?

That is all for today.

Bulletin ends.